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INDIA: Army Takeover in Punjab

The Indian Army took charge of security in Punjab State late Saturday, hours before the moderate Sikh Akali Dal Party was scheduled to begin a blockade of grain shipments out of the state. Some 12,000 Army troops have surrounded the Sikhs' holiest shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, which serves as the headquarters for extremists whose clashes with Hindus and paramilitary forces have caused 30 deaths since Friday, according to press reports. The Indian Government has sealed all Punjab's borders, banned foreigners from the state, and prohibited all reporting and publication of news relating to the Sikhs' campaign for greater autonomy and the operation of security forces in the state. [REDACTED]

Comment: Prime Minister Gandhi had previously avoided calling on the Army to restore order in Punjab because the traditionally apolitical military finds internal security duties distasteful, and the Army has a high representation of Sikhs. Her crackdown probably will be applauded outside Punjab. If the Army is unable to end the violence within several months, Gandhi could declare a state of emergency in Punjab as a prelude to postponing the national election that otherwise must be held within the next eight months. [REDACTED]

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